

CHAPTER TWO

COMMANDERS

The military character of the late Byzantine aristocracy

Most late Byzantine aristocrats sought a military career and regarded a career in the fiscal and civil bureaucracy as beneath their dignity.¹ High aristocrats were attracted to military office because military power brought them closer to the emperor and provided the means to secure and improve their situation vis-à-vis the throne and the imperial household. Moreover, appointments to offices or grants of land and state resources were made by the emperor and were not hereditary. This meant that it was essential for the Byzantine aristocrats to promote their interests through imperial favour.² In an oration compiled for John V in the mid-fourteenth century, Kydones outlines the benefits for office holders: They could acquire land and houses, lend money to merchants and increase their influence on the government by gifts from those who wished to approach the emperor for appointments to office. They could also provide their kinsmen with access to state resources.³ It is certain that high-ranking military officers enjoyed these benefits. The career of John Kantakouzenos is the most characteristic example of an ambitious aristocrat who used his military office and the support of the army to increase his influence, secure imperial favour and in the end usurp the throne. In 1320, Kantakouzenos appears to have been an associate of the co-emperor Michael IX and in command of military forces in Gallipoli.⁴ After Michael IX's death, Kantakouzenos gave financial support for the revolt of Andronikos III

¹ K.-P. Matschke – F. Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz* (Koln/Weimar/Vienna, 2001), 20–21; D. Kyritses, “Η Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης και το τέλος του Βυζαντινού πολιτισμού,” [The Fall of Constantinople and the end of Byzantine Civilization], in T. Kiousopoulou (ed.), *Η Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης και η μετάβαση από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεότερους χρόνους* [The Fall of Constantinople and the Transition from the Medieval to the Modern Age] (Rethymnon, 2005), 164.

² Frankopan, “Land and Power,” 126; J. Haldon, “Social Elites, Wealth and Power,” in J. Haldon, (ed.), *A Social History of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2009), 182.

³ Kydones, *Correspondance*, I, 21.

⁴ Kantakouzenos, I, 24.

and the army received many payments from him and not from the imperial treasury. Inevitably, the soldiers of the imperial army would be more loyal to Kantakouzenos than to the emperor. In the early 1320s, as a result of the agreement between Andronikos II and Andronikos III, he was promoted to the office of *megas domestikos* which he held until the death of Andronikos III in 1341. Kantakouzenos' promotion to this office meant that he became the head of the entire Byzantine army.⁵ Accompanying Andronikos III on all his important campaigns enabled Kantakouzenos to increase his influence on the emperor and on the army. Indeed, during the civil war of 1341–1347, Kantakouzenos relied substantially on the support of the army. Immediately after the death of Andronikos III, Kantakouzenos opted to go to war with Bulgaria, the ruler of which, John Alexander (1331–1371), demanded that the Byzantines should extradite his predecessor, Michael Šišman. Kantakouzenos replied that Byzantine customs prevented him from satisfying John Alexander's demand and blamed the Bulgarian emperor for initiating a war.⁶ It cannot be excluded, however, that the real reason for Kantakouzenos' decision to go to war against the Bulgarians was the opportunity to increase his influence on the army by leading it on a campaign. Moreover, the anticipated war provided Kantakouzenos with the pretext to reform the military *pronoiai*. Apparently, reforms of this kind were the means to secure the support of the soldiers who were maintained through *pronoiai* against his rivals in the competition over the regency of John V, the son of Andronikos III.⁷

Furthermore, the civil war between Andronikos II and Andronikos III, which enabled Kantakouzenos to increase his power and influence, shows that the conflict between the interests of those running the state and those who stood outside the group of immediate family, clan, or individuals who enjoyed imperial favour could lead to explosive situations.⁸ It was a war fought between those who possessed the largest shares of the empire's resources under Andronikos II and those who by Michael IX's death lost their hope of gaining imperial favour and their priority in claiming offices and imperial grants. The inse-

⁵ For the office of *megas domestikos* in the late Byzantine period see S. Kyriakidis "The Role of *megas domestikos* in the Late Byzantine Army," *BSI* 66 (2008), 241–258.

⁶ Kantakouzenos, II, 54–55.

⁷ Kantakouzenos, II, 58–62.

⁸ See Haldon, "Social Elites," 174; For a detailed examination of the causes of the civil war of 1321–1328 and its events see Kyritses, *The Byzantine Aristocracy*, 333–350.

curity, caused by the limited resources of the Byzantine state and its territorial reduction, induced dissatisfied aristocrats and associates of the deceased co-emperor, such as John Kantakouzenos, Theodore Synadenos and Syrgiannes, to rebel actively against the emperor and support the revolt of Michael IX's son, Andronikos.⁹

Although social distinctions in Palaiologan society were clearer than they had been in previous historical periods, the assumption of military command by members of the social elite was not a new development, since the military aristocracy had emerged in the middle Byzantine period. Moreover, it was possible for a limited number of people of low birth to enrich themselves and to climb the social ladder through a successful military career and the limited available evidence suggests that the military elite was not hostile to commanders whose ancestry was not aristocratic.¹⁰ The very negative comments which Kantakouzenos and Akropolites make about Alexios Apokaukos and the Mouzalon brothers reflect only the political circumstances of the moment and personal differences. For instance, Kantakouzenos provides a rather negative image of Apokaukos, who was his main opponent in the civil war of 1341–1347. However, he does not object to the rise of Manuel Tagaris to high office. As Kantakouzenos writes, Tagaris was of low social status, but because he distinguished himself in the constant warfare against the Turks in Philadelphia, he became *megas stratopedarches*, married a niece of the emperor and became a member of the senate, that is to say a leading aristocrat.¹¹ That bishop Matthew of Ephesos presents a completely different picture of Tagaris' military skills does not affect Kantakouzenos' belief that soldiers of lower social status could advance up the social and military hierarchy.¹² Akropolites was the only one of these new men who survived Michael

⁹ For Theodore Synadenos see *PLP*, 27125; C. Hannick – G. Schmalzbauer, "Die Synadeno: Prosopographische Untersuchung zu einer byzantinischen Familie," *JÖB* 25 (1976), 136–137.

¹⁰ For social mobility in late Byzantium see G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakuzenos—Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch—in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 57–60; Matschke-Tinnefeld, *Gesellschaft*, 27–28.

¹¹ Kantakouzenos, I, 91; Weiss, *Kantakuzenos*, 58. There is no evidence to suggest that in the late Byzantine period there was any attempt to recreate the title and function of senator. The use of the term senate reflects the archaic terminology of the sources but not any institutional change. See the detailed discussion of Kyrrites, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 53–66.

¹² Matthew of Ephesos, *Briefe*, 106, 108, 206.

VIII's coup. Therefore, it was dangerous in his *History* to have inserted positive comments about the Mouzalon brothers. It should not be forgotten that Michael VIII had them murdered in order to ascend the throne.¹³

At the same time as the militarisation of the imperial office came the adoption by the Byzantine elite of an ideal of heroic individualism. This ideal promoted valour on the battlefield, which was displayed through daring acts against the enemy, coupled with excellence in physical activities such as horsemanship and hunting.¹⁴ The lengthy poem which Manuel Philes compiled for John Kantakouzenos is primarily an encomium of the latter's skills in the art of war, and his physical prowess. Praising Kantakouzenos' hunting skills, Philes calls him 'a courteous knight who is chasing his prey' and 'he stifles with the point of his spear everything that is difficult to fight at close quarters.'¹⁵ Shortly afterwards, Kantakouzenos is praised for his deeds against the Turks.

When an army of barbarians threw Thrace into confusion you teemed with arms and headed to achieve great deeds. You were standing still in the middle of the battle line roaring as a lion ready to attack its prey. And you killed with your sword the invaders.¹⁶

Michael Doukas Tarchaneiotes Glabas in turn is depicted as a wise general whose sword was painted with blood and whose armies secure victories before the battle begins. He is also praised for slaughtering the Bulgarians as if they were sheep.¹⁷ In a prayer commissioned by Syrgiannes, Philes wrote, 'Boasting of you as my protectors I do not shudder to see the sword even if I am left behind fighting against foreigners you will stand in the first rank as my supporters.'¹⁸ Similarly, the funerary epigram which is still in place above the tomb of the *megas konostaulos* Michael Tornikes insists on his military successes:

¹³ See Macrides, *The History*, 19–28.

¹⁴ A. Kazhdan, "The Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal," in M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XII Centuries* (Oxford, 1984), 52.

¹⁵ Philes, I, 144.

¹⁶ Philes, I, 149.

¹⁷ Philes, II, 56–57, 248. For Michael Doukas Tarchaneiotes Glabas see *PLP*, 27504; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 121.

¹⁸ Philes, I, 244–245.

And upon enemies he breathed a strategic flame (such as military rules required) and was an irresistible thunderbolt upon their serried ranks. He presided over the army like a father guarding the commonweal lest any advantage to it should be stolen. Contracting a high-born and seemly marriage connection, and securing thus royal affinity.¹⁹

The cult of the martial virtues did not prevent Byzantine military leaders from seeking distinctions in the sphere of letters. The *megas domestikos*, emperor, monk and historiographer John Kantakouzenos is a well-known case. Wishing to promote Kantakouzenos' military skills, Philes depicts him as a great warrior, an 'invincible giant in battles.' Shortly afterwards he praises him for compiling 'works of wisdom.' Michael Tarchaneiotēs Glabas is said to have compiled theological works. He was the patron of the Pammakaristos monastery and after capturing Sozopolis from the Bulgarians he founded the monastery of St John.²⁰

Beyond the poems of Philes, examples praising individual bravery on the battlefield can be found in historical accounts which show great men turning the tide of battle by their prowess and by cutting a path through their enemies. Akropolites' and Gregoras' descriptions of the fighting between Theodore I and the Seljuk sultan in the battle of Antioch-on-the-Meander extol individual heroism on the battlefield. During the course of the battle, 'being confident to the strength of his body' the sultan was seeking to fight the emperor in person. When the sultan approached, Laskaris inflicted on him a powerful blow. Then Laskaris fell from his horse. Theodore I managed to recover rather quickly. While the sultan was ordering his soldiers to capture him, 'Theodore, who had fallen from his horse as dead, suddenly stood up and, filled with rage and enthusiastic impulse,' he took out his sword and hit the sultan's horse. The sultan fell from his large horse 'as if he was falling from a tower.' He was immediately beheaded by the emperor, according to Gregoras' and Choniates' sources; by an unknown soldier, according to Akropolites' source.²¹ Describing the battle of Rosokastron, where in 1332 the Bulgarians under the leadership of their ruler John Alexander inflicted a heavy defeat on the

¹⁹ A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London, 1912), 330–333, whose translation this is. For Michael Tornikes see *PLP*, 29132.

²⁰ Philes, I, 180, II, 230–233, 245.

²¹ Akropolites, I, 16–17; Gregoras, I, 20–21; Choniates, *Orationes*, 171.

Byzantines, Gregoras comments that Kantakouzenos sustained many blows inflicted on him by the swords and spears of the enemies. Yet he managed to overcome many enemies. Throughout the battle, he lost neither his shield nor his sword. He still remained firmly on his horse. Gregoras adds that the second bravest warrior after Kantakouzenos was the *protosevastos*, son of the caesar (John Palaiologos) and grandson of the *porphyrogennetos* (Constantine Palaiologos, son of Michael VIII). Gregoras comments that although his horse was seriously wounded after receiving many blows he did not bear the shame of retreat.²²

These accounts of heroic deeds on the battlefield are similar to descriptions of military conflict in the wider geographical context of the Byzantine world. Recording the deeds of Leonardo Tocco, the anonymous author of the *Chronicle of the Toccos*, who was a proud 'Roman,' relates how in 1402 his hero sustained the blows inflicted on him by nine lances and his horse was killed after it was repeatedly hit by the lances of his Albanian enemies in Angelokastro. However, brandishing his sword and fighting against many enemies, Tocco managed to cut through the lines of the enemy and save his life. In another instance, Tocco is portrayed as standing on the saddle of his Calabrian horse like a sun. As the anonymous author remarks, he looked like a tower among his troops.²³

The ideal of heroic individualism is intensively promoted by the late Byzantine romances, which are not merely works of entertainment. They mirror ideals which were amongst society's ideals in this period and their content reflects the values and culture of the higher aristocracy.²⁴ The *Achilleid* is a work that can be connected to the court of Neopatras of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and therefore, it would appear to be precluded in Byzantine territory adjoining Frankish Greece.²⁵ Its hero is not only an excellent general and clever tactician. On the battlefield he displays great bravery, which often results in the mass killing of the enemies. Contrary to the sug-

²² Gregoras, I, 486–487. He was the son of John Palaiologos and Eirene Metochites, daughter of the *megas logothetes*, Theodore: Sevčenko, *Études*, 149.

²³ *Cronaca dei Tocco di Cefalonia di Anonimo*, G. Schiró (ed.), (Rome, 1975), vv. 340–348.

²⁴ D. Jacoby, "Knightly Values and Class Consciousness in the Crusader States of the Eastern Mediterranean," *MHR* 1 (1986), 166.

²⁵ *The Byzantine Achilleid. The Naples Version*, O.L. Smith (ed.), (Vienna, 1999), vv. 590–602, 620–625; Magdalino, *Between Romaniae*, 89.

gestions of his brothers, Kallimachos, who is called invincible in battle and great in war, decided to continue his march through an inhospitable mountain. He wonders how he would stand in a battle and achieve heroic deeds if a mountain can defeat him. He cannot accept that he might not inherit the empire because he could not overcome such difficulties. In this case, their father should not bequeath the empire to any of his sons and relatives, but to a stranger who is a brave soldier. In addition, the hero feels shame before his generals and soldiers. Eventually, it is decided to let most of the army and the baggage train go and to resume their march, carrying only what is necessary.²⁶ The heroes of the *War of Troy*, like Iasou, are called brave and strong-handed soldiers who have fought many fierce battles from which they have emerged victorious. The accounts of battles focus on the deeds of individual heroes.²⁷

The role of Western European military ideals and practices

Was the development of a military ethos which emphasised valour in combat influenced by Western European military ideas and ideals? Although military manuals exhort the general not to participate in the fighting himself because a disaster to him might cause the whole army to be demoralised, long before 1204, Byzantine authors were not reticent about praising the heroic acts of emperors and generals.²⁸ As an emperor and aristocrat, Kantakouzenos, throughout his *History*, promotes ideas about war which are quite similar to Western European ideas. Honour (*time*) is the main one. During the conflict with Bulgaria he stated that it is an honour for the Byzantines not to be despised by the 'barbarians.' Kantakouzenos also expressed the wish not to be

²⁶ *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, in E. Kriaras (ed.), *Τα μεσαιωνικά ιπποτικά μυθιστορήματα* [*The Medieval Chivalric Romances*] (Athens, 1955), vv. 101–145. *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* is attributed to Michael VIII's nephew, Andronikos Komnenos Doukas Angelos Palaiologos: R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (Cambridge, 1986), 101.

²⁷ *The War of Troy*, M. Papathomoupoulou – E. Jeffreys (eds.), (Athens, 1996), vv. 57–59, 940–1029.

²⁸ G.T. Dennis, "The Byzantines in Battle," in N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium at War (9th–12th Centuries)* (Athens, 1997), 174; J. Haldon, "Blood and Ink: Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes towards Warfare and Diplomacy," in J. Shepard – S. Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy* (London, 1994), 287.

outstripped by anyone in his offering of servants, money, and of himself 'for the honour of the Byzantine emperors.'²⁹ In another example, describing the games organised by Andronikos III on the occasion of his marriage, Kantakouzenos remarks that the participants sought honour and he is proud to say that the emperor has proved better than his Western European opponents.³⁰ He also contrasts fighting for honour with fighting for money. Kantakouzenos told the Serbian ruler that for the Byzantines it is dishonourable to serve for pay and not for the love of honour and friendship.³¹ Similarly, he promotes the value of defending the fatherland and the Christians, considering it his duty. He states that one of the main duties of the emperor is to thwart the 'Ismaelites.' He also comments that he wished to see the Turks being punished for the sufferings that they inflicted on the Christians.³² The ideals described in the *History* of Kantakouzenos do not differ substantially from those praised by the prince of Achaia, William II of Villehardouin, as they are stated in the *Chronicle of the Morea*. According to the anonymous author on the eve of the battle of Pelagonia, William II commented that his aim was to augment his honour, wealth and fame. To achieve this he should not be unjust and grab from his relatives and friends. The prince concludes that he should be praised for doing so because these are the ideals that every soldier ought to seek.³³

Furthermore, both the Byzantine and Western elites had the same goal, the maintenance of their privileges and status; the possession of high military office was a means of achieving this. For this reason, the Byzantine military aristocracy did not hesitate to accept some Western European practices related mainly to the display of superiority and class exclusiveness. It is logical to conclude that the adoption of chivalric practices was useful not merely for the display of power. It also influenced and corresponded to the military ethos of at least a significant part of the late Byzantine aristocracy. In this context, the Byzantine ruling elite promoted activities such as tournaments and jousting. Both tournaments and jousting have their origins in eleventh-century warfare, and apart from martial prowess and the promotion

²⁹ Kantakouzenos, I, 184–185.

³⁰ Kantakouzenos, I, 204–205.

³¹ Kantakouzenos, III, 143.

³² Kantakouzenos, III, 59.

³³ *Chronicle of the Morea*, vv. 4141–4156.

of class exclusiveness, they were used as part of the training that the soldiers were expected to receive.³⁴

With reference to late Byzantium, it has been argued that,

The brief appearances of sport of this kind in a culture, where ideals of chivalry were known, but regarded an alien concept, indicate the furthest and most unexpected limit of the tournament's appeal.³⁵

However, war games were no innovation in late Byzantium. Long before a Byzantine emperor participated for the first time in a tournament, Nikephoros II Phokas held in 966 a cavalry contest (*hippikos agon*) in the hippodrome of Constantinople which terrified the townspeople, who, according to Leo the Deacon were ignorant of military activities. Leo also comments that Nikephoros' aim was to train his troops for war.³⁶ Undeniably, the historical, social and political context in which Nikephoros II organised this event was very different from the period of the tournaments. Moreover, this was a show in which the participants were regular soldiers and not exclusively members of the aristocracy, who wished to promote their sense of class exclusiveness. Nonetheless, Nikephoros II was a member of a leading family of tenth-century military aristocrats and events such as the one mentioned above, which was then far away from the battlefields of the frontier zones, were aimed at the glorification of martial skills, which the military aristocracy of the tenth century promoted and used as its proving ground. Therefore, since one of the aims of the tournament and jousting was to promote and glorify the military skills of the ruling elite, there are some similarities between Nikephoros II's display and the tournaments.

Since Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) introduced Western European military practices into Byzantium, it is not surprising that he was in 1159 the first Byzantine ruler to participate in a tournament.³⁷

³⁴ M. Keen, *Chivalry* (Yale, 1984), 190; J.F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, tr. S. Willard – S.C.M. Southern (Suffolk, 1997), 30–36.

³⁵ R. Barber – J. Barker, *Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1989), 105.

³⁶ Leo the Deacon, *Leonis diaconis Caloensis Historiae libri decem*, C.B. Hase (ed.), (Bonn, 1828) 63; A.M. Talbot – D.F. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon* (Washington, 2005), 46–47, 112.

³⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 108. Choniates states that when Manuel I entered Antioch in 1159 he participated in a tournament with the local crusader knights. He was head of the Byzantine contestants, who were all his relatives. An anonymous text provides a

In late Byzantium there is evidence that such activities were organised. Moreover, the establishment in Frankish Greece of Western knights, such as William Bouchart, who according to the French version of the *Chronicle of the Morea*, was one of the best jousts in the West, made the Byzantines more familiar with jousts and tournaments.³⁸ Two of them were held by Andronikos III, as part of the celebration of his wedding and the birth of his heir apparent. They were probably small-scale events, apparently without any great military or political significance. Kantakouzenos noted that the participants sought honour; he does not say anything about military training.³⁹ Perhaps it was not a coincidence that both events were held at a time when tournament and jousting were widespread in Italy and in Savoy, the home of Andronikos III's wife.⁴⁰ In 1326, Anna of Savoy at her marriage to Andronikos III was accompanied to Constantinople by mounted esquires and nobles; they, as Kantakouzenos states,

Taught jousting and tournament to the Romans, who were ignorant of these games. Therefore, many Romans practiced these games seeking honour and particularly the emperor, who proved himself superior to his tutors. So, the Savoyans, French, Alamans and Burgundians conceded defeat.⁴¹

Kantakouzenos' description of this event, his statement that the participants sought honour, that Andronikos III proved superior to them, as well as the fact that he mentions the specific geographical origins of the Westerners, (the teams participating in the games were always formed on the basis of their geographical origins) show that not only did he approve the holding of this event, but also he fully understood its social significance. Kantakouzenos, Andronikos III and logically other people of their circle seem to have believed that tournament and *joustra* corresponded to the social structures of fourteenth-century Byzantium and to the military character of the late Byzantine aristocracy. Moreover, there is no evidence to indicate the existence

detail description of the garments worn by Manuel I in jousts: H. Maguire – L. Jones, "A Description of the Jousts of Manuel I Komnenos," *BMGS* 26 (2002), 104–148.

³⁸ Jousts and tournaments were held by the Frankish knights of the principalities of Achaia and Athens: *Chronicle of the Morea*, vv. 2408, 3368–3370; *Livre de la conquête*, ch. 1016–1017. See also the discussion of Jacoby, "Knightly Values," 158–186.

³⁹ Kantakouzenos, I, 204–205.

⁴⁰ Barber-Barker (*Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry*, 79–80) state that between 1320 and 1340 there are references to eight tournaments in northern Italy.

⁴¹ Kantakouzenos, I, 204–205.

in Byzantium of tournaments held by wealthy aristocrats without the consent of the emperor. Instead, the participants were the emperor, his relatives and close associates.

In contrast, Gregoras demonstrates the dichotomy between the traditional Byzantine ideological system and such sporting activities. Describing the games that Andronikos III organised in 1331, he remarks that 'they had been invented by the Latins long ago, to exercise their bodies when they were not involved in war.' Gregoras states that the emperor many times nearly escaped serious injury and was advised, mainly by the older people, to abstain from such games; he was told it was not proper for an emperor to be involved in games with servants. Before giving a detailed and precise description of the tournament, Gregoras says that Andronikos III considered the admonitions of the older people sheer cowardice.⁴² It seems that Gregoras and other Byzantines found Andronikos III's participation in such activities inappropriate for the imperial prestige. However, Gregoras does not speak against the idea of holding these games. What he opposes is imperial participation in them. It should not be forgotten that Gregoras disapproves of the manner of Andronikos III's ruling; he accuses Andronikos of neglecting old imperial customs, which are threatened with extinction and of indifference to the protocol of official ceremonies.⁴³

Andronikos III was not the only late Byzantine emperor who organised tournaments. There is additional evidence for tournaments in the account of the Burgundian traveler, Bertrandon de la Brocquière. He writes that in 1432 as part of the celebrations following the marriage of a member of the imperial family, he attended a tournament, which, however, was different from those held in his native land. He comments that the participants did not bear armour, but used sticks instead of swords and that no one was injured. This example shows that we cannot exclude the possibility that tournaments, even in a different form from the Western European ones, became common in late Byzantium. It is particularly interesting that, apart from the tournament mentioned above, Bertrandon de la Brocquière reports that he saw in the hippodrome the despot of the Morea, the emperor's brother, practicing together with other forty mounted archers in the

⁴² Gregoras, I, 482.

⁴³ Gregoras, I, 565–567.

fashion of the Turks. More specifically, each horseman threw his hat before him and shot at it as soon as he had passed it. Bertrandon concludes that the one whose arrow pierced his hat was esteemed the most expert.⁴⁴

Beyond the above references there is no further available information concerning the holding of jousting and tournaments in late Byzantium, although famous enthusiasts of such activities and of chivalric idealism, like Amadeo of Savoy and Jean le Meingre Boucicaut, came to Constantinople in 1366 and 1399 respectively with their own troops and fought in Byzantium's service.⁴⁵ Moreover, it should not be surprising that all the known emperors who have participated in war games, Nikephoros II Phokas, Manuel I Komnenos and Andronikos III Palaiologos, were proud soldiers with significant military experience. Tournaments and jousts provided members of the social elite with the opportunity to promote their martial prowess and enrich the festivities that followed great occasions. However, unlike Western Europe, late Byzantium had no individual warriors who sought enrichment through the rewards and ransoms involved in these games.

Although martial sports were attributable to Western influence, sports were not unknown in Byzantium; the *tzykanion* (ball game) was the sport of the ruling elite. Therefore, it promoted like *joustra* and tournaments the class exclusiveness of the higher aristocracy, but not its military character. It is worth noting, that although there is no evidence that the Nicaean rulers ever participated in or organised such activities, writing in the 1250s Nikephoros Blemmydes is very critical of them. While he recommends that the ruler should intensively train in war skills, he doubts whether duels and games such as the *tzykaton*, or war games of any kind are of any practical use.⁴⁶ However, almost a century later Kantakouzenos is praised by Manuel Philes for his performance in sports, mainly in *tzykanion*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bertrandon de la Brocquière, *La voyage d'Outremer de Bertrandon de la Brocquière*, Ch. Schefer (ed.), (Paris, 1892), 158–166.

⁴⁵ For the achievements of Amadeo and Boucicaut in tournament and jousting and for their ideas about chivalry see Ph. Contamine, "Les tournois en France à la fin du moyen âge," in J. Fleckenstein (ed.), *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter* (Goettingen, 1985), 438; Barber-Barker, "Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry," 80; N. Housley, "One Man and His Wars: The Depiction of Warfare by Marshall Boucicaut's Biographer," *JMH* 29 (2003), 27–40.

⁴⁶ *PG* 142, cols. 636–637.

⁴⁷ Philes, I, 150, 180–181.

Beyond Gregoras' criticism and Blemmydes' objections, nothing is known about the reactions that these activities might have caused in late Byzantium. For instance, in the West the church was hostile towards these activities, and since 1130 had repeatedly issued orders banning them, although these bans were never enforced. Eventually, they were revoked in 1316, a few years before the known late Byzantine tournaments took place.⁴⁸ No surviving information suggests that the Byzantine church during the period under discussion officially opposed war games, unless Gregoras' 'older people,' who opposed Andronikos III's participation, were members of the higher clergy. The lack of any opposition from the Byzantine church, like the ineffectual Western European bans, may strengthen the view that *joustra* and tournaments were not widespread in late Byzantium, or, more probably it reflects the scarcity of sources. Any conclusion entails much speculation.

Modern scholars debate whether or not heraldry existed in Byzantium. Heraldry has been defined as 'the systematic use of hereditary insignia on the shields of noblemen, which started following established rules from the 12th century.' Later, heraldic devices were displayed on the surcoats of knights, on the trappings of their horses, on their seals and on their tombs and effigies.⁴⁹ A study published in the 1920s concludes that no Byzantine family used heraldic emblems.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the presence of Western European knights in Frankish Greece and the existence of Latin mercenaries in the Byzantine army, who were admitted to the Byzantine nobility, must have made late Byzantine aristocrats familiar with Western European heraldry. Moreover, the cultural encounters in late medieval Mediterranean between Westerners, Byzantines and Muslims resulted in the development of what has been defined as a common 'language of power' among the Mediterranean elite.⁵¹ This meant that social groups of these diverse civilisations adopted signs and insignia which connoted their high status and prestige in a language that could cross cultural and

⁴⁸ D. Carlson, "Church Councils on Chivalry," in: H. Chikering – T.H. Seiler (eds.), *The Study of Chivalry. Resources and Approaches* (Kalamazoo, 1988), 144; Contamine, "Tournois en France," 427; Barber-Barker, *Tournaments, Jousts, Chivalry*, 139–145; R. Kaueper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999), 80.

⁴⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 125–126.

⁵⁰ G. Typaldos, "Εἶχον οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ οἰκόσημα;" [Did the Byzantines have Coats of Arms?] *Epeteris Etairias Vyzantinon Spoudon* 3 (1926), 206–222.

⁵¹ R. Ousterhout, "Byzantium between East and West and the Origins of Heraldry," in C. Hurihane (ed.), *Byzantine Art. Recent Studies* (Tempe, 2009), 170.

linguistic boundaries.⁵² In their investigation of the mosaics and frescoes of the Pammakaristos monastery (Fethiye Camii) in Istanbul, Mango, Belting and Mouriki conclude that the recurrence of the rampant lion in round medallions indicates that it is a family crest.⁵³ It is also interesting that the founder of the monastery was Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes, who was a renowned general. The image of the rampant lion was rather common in symbolic imagery across Western Europe and the Mediterranean.⁵⁴ Moreover, a crowned rampant lion bearing a sword with a monograph of a Palaiologan ruler once was visible in the sea walls of Constantinople, while the *Tzakones*, who were a palace guard unit, wore distinctive breastplate with lions.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in their investigation of the monastery of Lips (Fenari Isa Camii), Mango and Hawkins suggest that certain simple linear devices which accompany the monographs of the families of the Palaiologoi, the Asan and the Kantakouzenoi and are found on sarcophagi, coins and architectural fragments prove the existence of heraldic emblems in Byzantium.⁵⁶ It could be argued that their simplicity implies that most probably they were ornamental devices and not heraldic emblems.⁵⁷

While the aforementioned findings have been identified as heraldic symbols, there is no evidence that the rampant lion and other emblems, which were similar to the heraldic emblems used in the West, were bestowed by the emperor or codified according to a person or family.⁵⁸ Moreover, we do not know whether these emblems were transmitted among descendants like Western European heraldic symbols. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the arrangement and description of heraldic devices in Byzantium was regulated by well-defined rules. Nor do we know whether Byzantine soldiers and military leaders used heraldic emblems that recalled their heroic deeds and promoted their courage and bravery on the battlefield. It is worth noting that in the course of the thirteenth century heraldry stopped

⁵² See S. Redford, "A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament," *Mesogeios* 25/26 (2005), 283–310; Ousterhout, "Origins of Heraldry," 169.

⁵³ H. Belting – C. Mango – D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St Mary of Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul* (Washington, 1978), 21–22.

⁵⁴ Ousterhout, "Origins of Heraldry," 157–158.

⁵⁵ A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople* (London, 1899), 189; Pseudo-Kodinos, 181.

⁵⁶ C. Mango – E.J.W. Hawkins, "Additional Finds at Fenari Isa Camii," *DOP* 22 (1968), 181.

⁵⁷ Kyritses, *Byzantine Aristocracy*, 248.

⁵⁸ Ousterhout, "Origins of Heraldry," 159.

being the preserve of the greater aristocracy and became emblematic of the pride of birth and culture of the nobility in its broader range.⁵⁹ However, the Byzantine archaeological findings, which have been identified as heraldic emblems, are associated with members of the higher aristocracy.

As far as the narrative sources are concerned, in his description of the preparations of the Byzantine campaign against Martino Zaccaria, the Genoese ruler of Chios, Kantakouzenos may be implying the use of coats of arms by the Byzantines. He remarks that the soldiers decorated their shields and arms with their insignia (*parasema*) because, as he writes, in this campaign participated not only the common soldiers but also the noble and very powerful.⁶⁰ It is likely that these insignia were the family emblems of high aristocrats, indicating their pride of birth, high status and martial achievements. Furthermore, if we believe a Western source, Kantakouzenos was aware of the use and meaning of heraldry in the West. According to a French chronicle, in 1347, John Kantakouzenos permitted the mercenaries William Poujoize and John Bruidy, nobles of the city of Metz, to change the swallows in their arms into eagles, in recognition of their good service against the 'Saracen.'⁶¹ Moreover, it is likely that the ceremony of conferring the title of *kavallarios* upon Western European mercenaries involved the granting of the right to use armorial devices which promoted the high status, sense of honour and military achievements of the *kavallarioi*.

While the extent to which the Byzantines adopted heraldic emblems remains unknown, the later Byzantine aristocrats extensively used monograms of family names as an indication of pride of birth and connection to the ruling elite. It has been concluded that the extensive use of monographs shows that the emblems of Byzantine distinctiveness were based on written word and not on pictorial images.⁶² The monograms of family names were an indication of pride of birth and connection to the ruling elite. According to Oikonomides, sigillio-graphic evidence suggests that the use of monograms was common

⁵⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 127–128.

⁶⁰ Kantakouzenos, I, 375.

⁶¹ *Les chroniques de la ville de Metz*, J. Huguenin (ed.), (Metz, 1835), 83; J. Schneider, "Sir Nicole Louve: citain du Metz," in P. Contamine (ed.), *La noblesse au moyen âge* (Paris, 1976), 183.

⁶² Ousterhout, "Origins of Heraldry," 165.

between the sixth and eighth centuries. They became common again under the Komnenoi and mirror the growth of a new aristocracy in which blood ties with the imperial or other aristocratic families was of paramount importance.⁶³ A good example of a monogram bearing the name of an elite aristocrat of the later Byzantine period is provided by a seal of Theodore Synadenos.⁶⁴ A characteristic development of the later period was the use of monograms on the very clothes worn by the aristocrats. Such examples can be found in the portraits standing over the tombs in Kariye Cami. In the garment of Eirene Raoulaina Palaiologina, there are three distinct monograms. The most frequent ones are the monographs of the Palaiologoi and of the Asan-Palaiologoi, who were the descendants of Andronikos II's sister Eirene and her husband John III Asan of Bulgaria in 1278. These monograms appear also in two other tombs. The third monogram is that of the family of Raoul.⁶⁵ The funeral portraits of the frescoes of Kariye Cami show that more than one monogram per person could be used to promote and clarify a relationship by blood or marriage to the ruling elite.

The effectiveness of Byzantine generals on the battlefield

To evaluate the effectiveness of the late Byzantine generals, certain constraints should be borne in mind. For most of them, battlefield experience was limited. Very few military commanders had led troops in a significant number of battles or military operations of any kind for longer than a decade, as John Palaiologos and Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes had done. This development was no different from what was happening in Western Europe, where military experience, even for a king, was limited.⁶⁶ Moreover, almost all military commanders were chosen from a corps of officers who were recruited primarily not for their valour and military skills but because they conformed to specific social criteria. This inevitably caused a conservative attitude among

⁶³ N. Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, 1986), 153–154; idem, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, 1985), 23.

⁶⁴ W. Seibt, "Das Monogram-Siegel eines Theodoros Dukas Synadenos aus der frühen Palaiologenzeit," *JÖB* 40 (1970), 272.

⁶⁵ Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, I, 284–286.

⁶⁶ J. France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades. 1000–1300* (London, 1999), 140.

the late Byzantine leaders, since they did not need to improve their skills or to achieve important military successes to rise in the military hierarchy. This situation made it more difficult for the military leaders to learn from the experience of the past. In addition, the lack of sufficient resources in terms of manpower and finance did not allow the Byzantine army to keep up with the administrative, organisational and technological developments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Western Europe and in the early Ottoman state.

With regard to the training of the late Byzantine commanders, it should be noted that the significance of training was emphasised by the military treatises of earlier times. In addition to recognising training as essential for the maintenance of a reliable military force, they refer to the training of the entire army as a single unit and stipulate that the military commanders should be in charge of the training.⁶⁷ The question is how far these ideas on military training apply after 1204. Nikephoros Blemmydes, who was not a military man, in his *Imperial Statue*, emphasises the need for the army to be trained in land and sea warfare alike, and states that the emperor himself should be in charge of the training of his troops.⁶⁸ In contrast, Kantakouzenos indicates that training for the aristocratic commanders was personal. He states that he had been taught the art of war, together with his close friend Syrgiannes, by their common uncle Angelos, who was a military man.⁶⁹ Kantakouzenos also states that he had taught his nephew John Angelos the art of war, without explaining, what this teaching involved.⁷⁰ Manuel II comments that among the compulsory things that he was taught were the handling of the bow and the spear and how to ride.⁷¹ It is certain that Michael VIII Palaiologos and his

⁶⁷ For references to military training in Byzantine military manuals see *Taktika*, VII. 2; G.T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, 1985), 318; E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, 1995), 88. For a brief evaluation of military training in the middle Byzantine period see J. Haldon, "Approaches to an Alternative Military History of the Period ca. 1025–1071," in A. Avramea – A. Laiou – E. Chrysos (eds.), *The Empire in Crisis (?) Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025–1081)* (Athens, 2003), 54–55.

⁶⁸ PG 142, cols. 637–639.

⁶⁹ Kantakouzenos, I, 333–334; Nicol identifies Kantakouzenos' uncle with John Angelos Synadenos, the father of the *protostrator* Theodore Synadenos: D. Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor. A Biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and Monk, c. 1295–1383* (Cambridge, 1996), 17.

⁷⁰ Kantakouzenos, I, 274.

⁷¹ Manuel II, *Funeral Oration*, 104–105; Barker, *Manuel II*, 529; Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II*, 14.

brothers John and Constantine were been taught much by their father, Andronikos, who was a leading commander of John III. Alexios Raoul campaigned against the Turks in Asia Minor, together his brother and his son, John.⁷² Consequently, it seems safe to conclude that the custom for all the military commanders of the aristocracy was that they were trained in fighting and commanding troops by their close relatives. Almost all of them had an ancestor who had been a commanding officer. The personal training of the elite does not seem to have been a new development in late Byzantium. Members of the families of the military aristocracy in the middle Byzantine period were probably trained by their relatives. For instance, it is logical that the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas learnt a great deal from his father, the general Bardas Phokas.

Furthermore, describing the skills and qualifications of military leaders, late Byzantine sources refer to their training and experience more through their long involvement in military operations and less through practice and exercise outside war. Success was seen as a result of experience and not of theoretical knowledge. Pachymeres states that in 1281, Michael VIII, wishing to train his son Constantine in warfare sent him to lead a campaign against the Serbians in Macedonia.⁷³ An imperial panegyric praises the same emperor for his skills in handling the spear and the bow, which he acquired not through teaching but long practice.⁷⁴ Other examples refer to the experience of military commanders; Akropolites states that Nikolaos Kotertzes, the general sent by John III to defend Tzouroulou against the Latins had been tested in many wars and was so successful that everyone conceded that no one before him had managed to achieve so much.⁷⁵ The governor of Nicaea in 1263, Nikolaos Manuelites, is praised as an experienced soldier.⁷⁶ On the eve of the campaign in Bithynia, in 1329, Andronikos III asked the advice of the governor of Mesothynia, Kontophre, who, according to Kantakouzenos, had experience of many wars, in particular those against the Turks.⁷⁷

⁷² Philes, I, 440–441. For Alexios Raoul see *PLP*, 24115.

⁷³ Pachymeres, II, 599.

⁷⁴ *AG*, I, 326–327.

⁷⁵ Akropolites, I, 51.

⁷⁶ Pachymeres, I, 323.

⁷⁷ Kantakouzenos, I, 341.

Does the fact that personal experience was the primary source of knowledge mean that military manuals were unknown? It has been stated that one of the difficulties with which the Western military commander had to deal was that he was not served by an institutional memory and contemporaneous Western European authors comment that generals were taught the art of war through practice and not through any form of teaching.⁷⁸ However, late Byzantine generals had at their disposal military treatises, which, although written centuries before our period, would have been known and available.⁷⁹ The manuscript tradition of Byzantine military treatises, in particular of Leo's *Taktika*, is strong evidence that these works were in circulation in late Byzantium.⁸⁰ It is logical that late Byzantine generals read a significant part of the large number of manuscripts containing military treatises which circulated among them. Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes, a general with long military service in the late Byzantine period, is said to have written a military treatise, which has been lost.⁸¹ It would be interesting to know whether Glabas Tarchaneiotes' treatise was a repetition and imitation of older manuals, or reflected contemporary military developments and the personal experiences of the author, such as fighting against French heavy cavalry, which he encountered in Epiros and Albania, and technological advances, such as the increasing use of the crossbow. However, the lack of sufficient sources and the absence of late Byzantine military treatises make it difficult to understand how later Byzantine generals treated the military manuals compiled by their ancestors. It is reasonable to conclude that the technological developments and the changes that occurred in the art of war from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries would have made the practical advice of the military manuals of earlier epochs obsolete. Nonetheless, these works are likely to have attracted the literary interest of highly educated military commanders, such as Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaneiotes, John Kantakouzenos and Manuel II. Late Byzantine

⁷⁸ France, *Western Warfare*, 186; Settia, *pratica e teoria*, 20–26, with a discussion of the sources.

⁷⁹ See Kekaumenos, *Cecaumenos strategikon*, B. Wassiliewsky – V. Jernstedt (eds.), (St. Peterburg, 1896 repr. Amsterdam, 1965), 19. Although he is writing in the eleventh century, long before the period under discussion, he suggests that the general should read military and history books when he has leisure time and is not occupied by any duties.

⁸⁰ See A. Dain – J. de Foucault, "Les stratégistes Byzantins," *TM* 2 (1967), 317–392.

⁸¹ See Polemis, *The Doukai*, 121.

authors, Kantakouzenos, in particular, an experienced soldier, do not make direct references to older military manuals. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, some principles outlined by the military treatises of earlier epochs are echoed in late Byzantine authors. This cannot be seen simply as a repetition of the instructions prescribed in the older military manuals. It rather reflects the fact that the late Byzantine generals faced similar challenges to their ancestors, such as attacks from mounted bowmen.

Furthermore, in spite of being written in different political contexts, the military treatises and historical accounts of earlier periods in Byzantine history recognised the imbalance of resources between Byzantium and its enemies. Generals are exhorted to avoid fighting in unfavourable conditions and to avoid wasting manpower and resources. Instead, armies should proceed with the utmost caution; generals preferred to use craft and intelligence.⁸² Similarly, aware of the unviable strategic position of their state, late Byzantine authors exhort the generals to do their best to avoid unnecessary risks, which would result in the waste of valuable resources. Victory could be achieved through a combination of delaying tactics, stratagems and the exploitation of enemy weaknesses, while generals should do their best to protect their manpower. Kantakouzenos remarks that the good general is not only the one who achieves victories but also the one who when he fails does not lose his forces.⁸³ To give another instance, the same author states that the most prudent of the emperors did not always use bravery to encounter the enemies in pitched battle; they also used deception, cunning methods and stratagems, in particular when they are engaged with fearful and very strong enemies; no one reproaches them for cheating. On the contrary, everyone admires those methods which achieve more than bodily strength could.⁸⁴ Thomas Magistros exhorts the emperor to keep the aim of his military operations secret. He suggests that when the emperor campaigns against the Persians (Turks) he should pretend that he is marching on the Ethiopians (Mameluks), and if he wishes to fight the Bulgarians, he should make preparations to march on the Serbians.⁸⁵ Kantakouzenos did exactly this in 1341. His intention was to march on Adrianople. He

⁸² Haldon, "Blood and Ink," 281–294; Dennis, "The Byzantines in Battle," 165.

⁸³ Kantakouzenos, I, 103.

⁸⁴ Kantakouzenos, II, 116.

⁸⁵ *PG* 145, col. 466.

did not want his plans to be revealed and therefore, pretended that he was marching on other Thracian cities.⁸⁶ In the Funeral Oration to his brother, the despot of Morea, Theodore I, Manuel II, writes,

Need I say that it is a law of war that a man putting his enemy to flight by deceit should be praised more than if he were to defeat him in open battle? For in the first case the general wins a victory without any losses, while in the second case he is compelled to sacrifice many of his men.⁸⁷

Although it is highly likely that individuals such as Kantakouzenos and Manuel II read old military manuals, these statements do not suggest the direct influence of these military treatises. Rather they reflect similarities in the military and political context and the continuation in the later period of traditional Byzantine attitudes towards warfare, which emphasised the avoidance of military conflict. Moreover, precepts such as avoidance of battle, passive resistance, complemented by harassment tactics aimed at leading the enemy to overextend his lines, attrition of the enemy by trying to deprive him of water and forage, and the use of spies and deserters for the dissemination of false rumours, appear in the Hellenistic and Roman treatises.⁸⁸

The planning of the Byzantine tactics at the battle of Pelagonia (1259) exemplifies the above principles. The Byzantines employed delay and guerrilla tactics, damaging the supplies, coherence and morale of the enemy, mainly of the Western European knights, whose strength was based on discipline. Therefore, the outcome of the battle was decided by good leadership. The Byzantine military command managed through the proper tactical formation to reverse the expected outcome of the battle. The Byzantines, taking advantage of the geography, gathered the right intelligence concerning the strength, size, weapons and also weak points of the enemy. Moreover, the employment of such tactics demanded a high degree of discipline, which the Byzantine generals managed to impose. The battle of Pelagonia proves that good leadership may overcome technological inferiority. The Latin knights bore armour and weapons that were much more expensive and heavier than

⁸⁶ Kantakouzenos, II, 187.

⁸⁷ Manuel II, *Funeral Oration*, 189.

⁸⁸ J. Haldon, *Warfare State and Society in the Byzantine World. 565–1204* (London, 1999), 37–38; Hunger, *Literatur*, II, 324–338.

those borne by the cavalry and foot archers of the Byzantine army.⁸⁹ In another example, on the eve of the civil war, in 1321, Kantakouzenos sees as a prudent act the refusal of the general Manuel Tagaris to obey Andronikos II's order to attack the troops of Andronikos III in Adrianople, because he did not know the strength of the enemy.⁹⁰

It is particularly interesting that ideas about prudent generalship can be found in romances, which reflect the class values and military ethos of the higher aristocracy. Although their authors promoted heroic deeds on the battlefield, they admit that such acts of bravery are not in agreement with prudent military thinking. For instance, Achilles rejects his general's advice to take the enemy by surprise at night. He argues that while this is good advice and correct in military terms, a night attack is not the act of brave and strong soldiers. He claims that even if they are victorious, such an action is shameful.⁹¹ Kallimachos' brothers hesitate to attack the heavily fortified castle, because to fight when there is no need to do so is something that the prudent general opposes.⁹² It is also noticeable that Kallimachos' second brother argues that the high mountain with rocky terrain and tall trees is unsuitable for the crossing of a large army followed by a large baggage train made up of camels. He also suggests that the army should not march through an uninhabited area.⁹³ The heroic general Belisarios, equally, executed one of his subordinates who complained that the burning of the fleet from which they landed in *Inglittera* was not a proper military action.⁹⁴ That the romances often specify that the heroic acts they describe are not compatible with prudent military thinking shows that the authors of these works possessed sound military knowledge and knew that the deeds they mention had little to do with battlefield realities.

⁸⁹ The battle of Pelagonia is very well documented and discussed in detail by modern scholarship. See Akropolites, I, 168–171; Pachymeres, I, 121–123; Gregoras, I, 71–75; *Chronicle of the Morea*, vv. 3550–3789; D. Nicol, *The despotate of Epiros* (Oxford, 1957), 170–182; D. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaiologos and the West. A study in Byzantine-Latin Relations. 1258–1282* (Harvard, 1959), 47–74; J.V.A. Fine, *The Late Byzantine Balkans* (Kalamazoo, 1995), 162–165; Shawcross, *Chronicle of the Morea*, 73–76; R. Milhailovski, “The Battle of Pelagonia, 1259: a New Look at the March Routes and Topography,” *BSI* 64 (2006), 275–284.

⁹⁰ Kantakouzenos, I, 90–92.

⁹¹ *Achilleid*, vv. 460–464.

⁹² *Kallimachos*, vv. 229–230.

⁹³ *Kallimachos*, vv. 89–101.

⁹⁴ *Ιστορία του Βελισσαρίου* [*The Story of Belisarios*], W. Bakker – A. van Gemert (eds.), (Athens, 1988), v. 202.

At the same time, the sources provide a considerable number of examples of generals blamed for imprudent action and miscalculation of the conditions in which they engaged in battle. In 1255, Constantine Strategopoulos and Constantine Tornikes, heading from Serres to Tzepaina, 'proved to be bad generals,' according to Akropolites. They fled before estimating the strength of the attacking Bulgarians and they left a large amount of booty in the hands of the enemy. Akropolites provides a justification, claiming that they were leading poor troops.⁹⁵ He also provides a number of other examples of bad generalship which led to defeats. He claims that Manuel Laskaris imprudently attacked a group of Mongol mounted archers leading heavy cavalry troops.⁹⁶ Similarly, Akropolites blames Xyleas for an attack on raiding Serbian troops without having scouted the area and gathered the necessary intelligence.⁹⁷ Regardless of whether Akropolites is to be believed or not, it should not be forgotten that he takes a negative view of those promoted by Theodore II to high military posts, these examples are indicative of what was considered bad leadership by the Byzantines. Furthermore, in 1347 the troops of the Phakrases defeated those of Dobrotič, because, as Kantakouzenos states, Dobrotič proved to be a bad general by sending his cavalry to fight in vineyards and ditches.⁹⁸

The emphasis that the later Byzantines put on avoiding battle does not differ from Western European attitudes at the time. The *Chronicle of the Morea*, despite its inaccuracies, reflects vividly the differences in battlefield tactics adopted by the Byzantines and the Latins in the Peloponnese. This source is negative towards the Byzantines and insists that they avoided fighting the Latins in the open field stating that the Byzantines 'would not fight the Latins with lances but with bows,' to demonstrate that the Byzantines were cowards in contrast to the brave Frankish warriors, who sought to fight in close quarters. However, this conduct, which was labeled deceitful when applied to the Byzantines, received a different treatment when the perpetrators were the Latins. Being aware of the fact that such views about bravery have little to do with the realities of warfare, the author of the *Chronicle* admits

⁹⁵ Akropolites, I, 114; Theodore II, *Epistulae*, 252.

⁹⁶ Akropolites, I, 123. For Manuel Laskaris see *PLP*, 14551.

⁹⁷ Akropolites, I, 145.

⁹⁸ Kantakouzenos, II, 585; George Phakrases was *protostrator* from 1346 to 1355. He was one of the generals of Kantakouzenos' army in Didymoteichon. See *PLP*, 29575. Dobrotič was despot of Dobrutza: *PLP*, 29073.

that, 'a brave soldier should combine resourcefulness and prudence and should fight cautiously against his enemies because as the prudent rightfully say, craft and cunning win over bravery.'⁹⁹

This similarity in attitudes to warfare is reflected in the treatise compiled by Theodore Palaiologos, the Byzantine ruler of an Italian principality. He comments that if the enemy is stronger, then it is impossible to fight a pitched battle. He also suggests that if an enemy is attacking and ravaging the lands of the ruler, the ruler should try to use spies to collect information about the strength and movements of the enemy.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the marquis of Montferrat refers to the usefulness, as well as the impact, of raiding warfare and to the need to avoid fighting against a seemingly stronger enemy.¹⁰¹ It seems that even in Western Europe the image of knights as illiterate and undisciplined soldiers who love war is exaggerated and modern scholarship has modified the popular view promoted by chivalric literature of the knight dominating warfare as an individualistic soldier. The battlefield reality was quite different, and the tactics employed by Western Europeans required high levels of personal discipline, as well as the ability of the knights to operate effectively in groups.¹⁰² Similarly, although heroism was praised, the Byzantine attitudes to warfare did not favour individualism. Moreover, discussing the military treatises compiled in fifteenth-century Italy, Michael Mallett concludes that these works emphasise the need for prudence and caution and epitomise the basic concept of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian and Western European warfare, which was as far as possible defensive and counteroffensive and relied on stratagem and deceit. Western European commanders were cautious about engaging the armies in major confrontations and were aware of the cost and risk of major military enterprises.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Chronicle of the Morea*, vv. 4930–4932; Shawcross, *The Chronicle*, 196–197, 201.

¹⁰⁰ Palaiologos Theodore, marquis of Montferrat, *Les enseignements de Théodore Paléologue*, C. Knowles (ed.), (London, 1983), 89–90.

¹⁰¹ Theodore Palaiologos, *Les enseignements*, 80–82.

¹⁰² B.S. Bachrach, "Caballus and Caballarius in Medieval Warfare," in H. Chikering – T.H. Seiler (eds.), *The Study of Chivalry. Resources and Approaches* (Kalamazoo, 1988), 197.

¹⁰³ M. Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters. Warfare in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1974), 177; France, *Western Warfare*, 13–16; Keen, *Chivalry*, 221–222.

The ideal leadership

Despite the prevalence of a cautious attitude to battle, the sources show that a number of generals had developed a reputation for their courage, bravery and generosity towards their troops. Pachymeres states that John Palaiologos achieved great deeds, and was feared by everyone for both his reputation and stature. Gregoras calls him unrestrained in his assaults, but prudent.¹⁰⁴ He also reports that Michael Doukas Glavas Tarchaneiotes was so experienced in the art of war that the other generals were like children before him.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Gregoras states that Michael Palaiologos had the prestige required by a ruler, due to long experience and practice in war.¹⁰⁶ He also relates that Manuel Tarchaneiotes was a close relative of the emperor and carried out many acts of heroism. He sustained many wounds in wars, he fought many battles and for this reason he acquired great experience in the art of war.¹⁰⁷ Kantakouzenos praises Manuel Tagaris for showing great courage and achieving great things against the Turks in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the most characteristic example of the influence of reputation is the *pinkernes* Alexios Philanthropenos. According to Gregoras, Philanthropenos' successful campaign against the Turks in 1295 had such an impact that, when he was sent to Philadelphia in 1323 without an army, either due to the lack of resources or because the emperor did not trust him, the Turks retreated.¹⁰⁹ It is quite possible that his reputation was the main reason for his appointment by Andronikos III as governor of the Aegean islands under Byzantine control in the 1330s.¹¹⁰ The importance of charismatic military leaders is accentuated by the fact that Alexios Philanthropenos was blind. Pseudo-Lachanas and Choïrovoskos provide two further examples of charismatic military leadership. In 1294 and in 1304, respectively, in a period when the Byzantine army could not resist the Turcoman chiefdoms, they managed to raise troops in Asia Minor to fight the Turks.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Pachymeres, I, 151, 285; Gregoras, I, 107.

¹⁰⁵ Gregoras, I, 159.

¹⁰⁶ Gregoras, I, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Gregoras, II, 652.

¹⁰⁸ Kantakouzenos, I, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Gregoras, I, 369.

¹¹⁰ Gregoras, I, 534; Kantakouzenos, I, 488–494.

¹¹¹ Pachymeres, III, 211–213, IV, 487–489. In March 1294, Pseudo-Lachanas succeeded in organising a significant force in Mesothynia. Pachymeres states that it was

The Byzantine commanders secured the loyalty and trust of their troops by their generosity, and by being on friendly terms with them, rather than by impressing them with their bravery and military deeds. The available source material indicates that the most effective way to maintain high levels of discipline and morale was to be close to the common soldiers, to encourage them by speeches, financial rewards, and, more importantly, hopes of the prospect of material profit. The sources unanimously connect financial reward and a friendly relationship between troops and leadership with the boosting of morale and military success. Pachymeres states that, even before Michael VIII ascended the throne he had taken special care of the frontier troops in Philadelphia, and by offering gifts, he inspired them to be more eager guards and more confident in their hopes.¹¹² Similar virtues are attributed to John Palaiologos, who, according to Pachymeres, surpassed everyone in generosity and himself detested money. As head of the army, John Palaiologos took care of the troops by speeches and gifts and above all treated his soldiers not as a despot, but as a brother.¹¹³ Alexios Philanthropenos' success in Asia Minor is attributed to his generosity not only towards his troops but also towards the enemy, thus making their surrender to the Byzantines a more attractive option and, as Pachymeres states, reducing their 'raging madness against us.'¹¹⁴ Praising the qualities of Alexios Philanthropenos, Gregoras states that he was generous and affable to his subordinates. He points out that this is the best means for a general to achieve victories and trophies.¹¹⁵ Planoudes, who claims that he witnessed the vast quantity of spoils captured by Philanthropenos' army, confirms Pachymeres and Gregoras by mentioning the Achyraitai, a group which hoped to be benefited by Philanthropenos' successes.¹¹⁶ Kantakouzenos provides a more specific

composed of farmers, ignorant of the needs and realities of warfare, and their conduct was that of bandits, not of soldiers. In the summer of 1304, John Chirovoskos, leading a band of 300 archers and mace-bearers, offered to fight in Asia Minor against the Turks. Initially, he was arrested by the imperial authorities, but he escaped in Asia Minor, where he organised a force on the Skamandros. Eventually he was defeated at the hands of the Turks. He reappears in 1307, when he was sent to lead a force of 1000 in Macedonia against the Catalans and their Turkish allies. However, this force did not achieve anything.

¹¹² Pachymeres, I, 141.

¹¹³ Pachymeres, I, 285.

¹¹⁴ Pachymeres, III, 239; Gregoras, I, 196.

¹¹⁵ Gregoras, I, 196.

¹¹⁶ Pachymeres, III, 239; *Maximi Monachi Planudis Epistulae*, A. Leone (ed.), (Amsterdam, 1991), 116–118, 150, 154, 171–172, 180–181.

example. In 1350, in the battle on the walls of Edessa, Kantakouzenos promised a reward of four *mnas* to whoever would be the first to bring down a banner from the walls, three *mnas* to the second and two *mnas* to the third.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Gregoras states that Syrgiannes secured the loyalty of his troops by his generosity, in particular by providing his troops with much booty.¹¹⁸ The same historian states that on the eve of the civil war of 1341–1347, the army supported Kantakouzenos because,

They saw him as their wealth provider and as a fellow soldier rather than their general. He used to share the pains of the campaigns with them encamping in the countryside even during the winter.¹¹⁹

Suggestions of this kind can also be found in the military manuals of the earlier periods. The *Taktika* of Leo suggests that generals should reward soldiers and units which excelled themselves on the battlefield with armour, booty and offices.¹²⁰ Moreover, generosity towards brave soldiers is an ideal promoted by works of fiction. The anonymous author of the *Story of Belisarios* describes how his protagonist, the heroic general Belisarios, rewarded the soldiers who were the first to raise the imperial standards on the enemy walls with two splendid horses, beautiful saddles and golden swords.¹²¹

The military manuals of the middle Byzantine period indicate that military leaders inspired their troops by battle orations. The *Taktika* of Leo the Wise suggests that the general should be a good orator, who raises the spirits of the soldiers for the battle and boosts their morale.¹²² The author of the treatise *On Skirmishing* admonishes the commander to inspire the soldiers by delivering speeches beginning with the phrase ‘we are standing in a manly and brave way.’¹²³ By talking to his troops, the military leader wanted to show that he was not different from his soldiers, that he cared for their welfare, and that they should see him as comrade or father, rather than as the unapproachable leader of a higher social status who did not share their interests. These

¹¹⁷ Kantakouzenos, III, 129. It is not clear what currency Kantakouzenos had in mind.

¹¹⁸ Gregoras, I, 297.

¹¹⁹ Gregoras, I, 586.

¹²⁰ *Taktika*, XVI. 4.

¹²¹ *Ιστορία του Βελισσαρίου*, vv. 172–173.

¹²² *Taktika*, II. 12.

¹²³ *Le traité sur la Guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)*, G. Dagron – H. Mihăescu (eds.), (Paris, 1986), 125.

principles continued to apply in the late period. In his encomium of Andronikos II, Choumnos comments that the emperor enhanced the fighting spirit of the army of Asia through speeches.¹²⁴ Encouragement through orations was more important when the army was in a very difficult position and defeat seemed imminent. According to Gregoras, before the battle of Rossokastro (1332) Andronikos III delivered a speech to encourage his troops, exhorting them not to be afraid since small armies very often defeated larger forces.¹²⁵ Similarly, in 1343, when the army of Kantakouzenos was encircled by Apokaukos and the Serbians in the Axios river, he delivered a speech reminding his soldiers that in the past Byzantine emperors had managed through bravery to achieve a victory against the odds.¹²⁶ Another interesting example is provided by the *Story of Belisarios*. The hero of this work, the general Belisarios, tries to encourage his soldiers by calling them 'brothers.'¹²⁷ The accuracy of the general's words may be questioned, since these speeches are rhetorical products of the authors of these historical accounts. Nonetheless, it has been argued that the tradition of historiography demanded that devices of amplification and ornamentation such as speeches had to be plausible and consequently, that these orations reflect the author's conceptions of motivation and morale in war.¹²⁸

The picture of ideal generalship, which includes, as discussed above, all the skills a general needed, is provided by Gregoras. Gregoras portrays Philes Palaiologos as the ideal Byzantine military commander who in 1313 managed to restore the morale of the forces under his command and to defeat the Turks of Halil, who were plundering Thrace after breaking from the Catalan Grand Company which had followed as allies in their advance towards Thessaly and Attica. Philes Palaiologos was not a full-time 'professional' military commander. Gregoras implies that he owed his success to his attitude to his troops. He had realised that the inability of the state to resist the Turks of Halil in Thrace had damaged the morale of the Byzantine forces. He requested permission from Andronikos II to lead the Byzantine

¹²⁴ AG, I, 21.

¹²⁵ Gregoras, I, 486.

¹²⁶ Kantakouzenos, II, 251.

¹²⁷ *Ιστορία του Βελισσαρίου*, v. 190.

¹²⁸ See R.E. Bliese "Rhetoric and Morale: A Study of Battle Orations from the Central Middle Ages," *JMH* 15 (1989), 201–226.

troops against Halil, asking not only for the command of the troops but also the freedom personally to select his soldiers. This means that he probably chose those he considered more loyal to him. According to Gregoras, Philes did not have the figure of a military man; he was thin and weak and most of the time he was ill. Despite his bodily weakness, however,

He ignited the flame of war in his troops by his friendliness towards them and by donating horses and money. He even gave his belt to one soldier and to another he gave the knife he wore beside his sword. He lived and slept with his soldiers, promising them high honours and grants after the war according to the performance of each man. Before the battle, he tried to encourage them through speeches.¹²⁹

Although there are doubts concerning the reliability of Gregoras' account, for he does not mention the impact of the reinforcement by a force of 2000 soldiers from the Serbian ruler Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321), this description of Philes' role is indicative of what the late Byzantines perceived as an ideal general.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Gregoras, I, 263–266.

¹³⁰ Gregoras, I, 268.

